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"URGENT FURY: Rational Action or Bureaucratic Politics Run Amok?"

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As Americans observe their nation's humanitarian intervention in Somalia and listen to an accelerating drumbeat for armed entry into the even uglier ethnic warfare of Bosnia, they naturally grope for some sense of national interest in these evolving tragedies. As several recent lecturers at the National War College have commented, these sorts of ill-defined nasty little wars may well absorb the energies of the United Nations, regional alliances such as NATO, and individual nations for the next several decades. As the policy debate expands in coming weeks and months, it will prove useful to examine past United States' interventions to identify criteria for employment of armed force.

The Context of URGENT FURY

While any number of armed excursions come to mind, the October 1983 invasion of Grenada offers a particularly useful set of starkly contrasting arguments about American projection of combat power into developing nations. Operation URGENT FURY came in the midst of the Reagan administration's massive military rebuilding and proved a clear test of the Reagan Doctrine that espoused a willingness to actively support reversal of communist revolutions, especially in the western hemisphere. URGENT FURY is also an appropriate case study because it occurred after passage of the hotly contested War Powers Resolution and the equally controversial establishment of Congressional oversight of the intelligence community.

There appears to be no middle ground in the debate over American action in Grenada. Opponents of the operation view it as a thinly disguised effort by various federal departments and agencies, manipulated by right-wing zealots, to unlawfully interfere with disproportionate force in the internal problems of a sovereign nation. The equally vigorous counterargument states the invasion of this tiny Caribbean island was a logical, well-reasoned response to a real threat to American and Caribbean interests. This paper examines the principal points of the opposing arguments and then offers a judgement, based on the available evidence, on whether URGENT FURY was the act of a highly politicized bureaucracy determined to ignore reality or was an appropriate military response rationally chosen to defend clearly defined American interests.

A Politicized Bureaucracy

Those who criticize the United States' behavior in Grenada make the following key points:

- Grenada was simply a poor island nation attempting to pick its way through the superpower struggle.
- the Carter, then Reagan administrations misjudged the nature of Maurice Bishop's 1979 overthrow of Eric Gairy's government.
- the Point Salines airport construction was simply a massive economic development effort that never threatened the

United States or Caribbean nations.

•the State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, and Department of Defense undertook a variety of measures to actively undermine Maurice Bishop's legitimate government.

•the expansion and arming of Grenada's army and militia was a Cuban effort to help protect a fellow socialist government from American encroachment and posed no real threat to American or Caribbean interests.

•American intervention was unlawful under the United Nation's Charter

•the issue of American student safety at St George's University School of Medicine was a false pretext for invasion.

•American use of force was inept and tactical intelligence was non-existent.

A more detailed look at these arguments provides an interesting perspective on U.S. foreign policy methods and tactics. URGENT FURY's critics generally trace their displeasure back to United States' reaction to the New Jewel Movement's (NJM) nearly bloodless coup of March 13, 1979. The NJM, led by dedicated socialist Maurice Bishop, overthrew the government of the rather bizarre elected prime minister, Eric Gairy, who was traveling to New York at the time of the coup. Bishop's charisma and efforts to improve the island nation's economy, education, and health made him a popular leader. However, Fidel Castro's early embrace of the NJM government had an immediate chilling effect on Grenada-U.S. relations. When U.S. Ambassador Frank Crtiz warned

Bishop in April 1979 against closer ties with Cuba, the NJM government responded resentfully.¹ Critics point to this event as the beginning of consistently inept U.S. diplomacy that unnecessarily drove Maurice Bishop leftward to the waiting arms of Fidel Castro. America's inability to recognize NJM as a natural response to both the abusive power of Eric Gairy's rule and Grenada's dismal economic conditions is seen by foreign policy critics as the central element of a persistent U.S. diplomatic failure to offer a reasonable alternative to Fidel Castro's Marxist model. Maurice Bishop bitterly denounced American rejection of his nation's needs in a July 13, 1981 speech: "The real problem that small countries like ours face is that on a day-by-day basis we come up against an international system that is organized and geared toward ensuring the continuing exploitation, domination and rape of our economies, our countries and our peoples".²

Diplomatic heavy-handedness was then followed by active American efforts to thwart the centerpiece of Grenada's economic renewal-- a modern commercial airport at Point Salines to support a potentially lucrative tourist industry. Raymond Burrowes provides an extensive analysis of the crucial political and economic importance of the Point Salines airport.³ He outlines in substantial detail his belief that U.S. efforts to derail British and IMF loans to Grenada guaranteed Fidel Castro an unparalleled opportunity to finance the airport and earn Grenada's utmost trust and respect. Burrowes carries his argument to the heart of the issue of the airport's utility as a Soviet-Cuban air base; he asserts, "they

would have found also that the airport had absolutely no military features at all".⁴

Critics of the U.S. policy portray a shift in American behavior from diplomatic blundering and economic short-sightedness during the last two years of the Carter administration to a deliberate provocative Reagan effort to undermine the Bishop government through a combination of diplomatic isolation, CIA dirty tricks, and military intimidation. These actions fell within a pattern of behavior that included enormous American aid to El Salvador's counterinsurgency campaign and funding and training of the Contras to harrass Nicaragua's Sandanista government. The political agenda of the Reagan Doctrine is alleged to have driven several U.S. agencies to act counter-productively. Among those instances cited were:

- a United States International Communications Agency conference in May 1981 to convince Caribbean editors to isolate Grenada.⁵
- blocking of a \$19 M IMF loan to Grenada in April, 1981.⁶
- intense U.S. lobbying in Europe to block \$30 M EEC Commission co-financing of Point Salines airport.⁷
- deliberate exclusion of Grenada from the Reagan Caribbean Basin Initiative in February, 1982.⁸
- a large military exercise dubbed Ocean Venture '81 with a subordinate exercise named Operation Amber that was allegedly a Grenada invasion rehearsal.⁹

This combination of American diplomatic neglect and overt hostility has been offered as the primary justification for the

NJM government's acceptance of major Cuban arms and training. Payne, Sutton, and Thorndike outline the substantial military assistance granted not only by Cuba but also the \$25.8 million in military aid from the Soviet Union and \$12 million in military aid from North Korea. They also describe three secret protocols between Grenada and its primary suppliers to ensure secrecy of the arms shipments.⁹ Payne's self-defense perspective of this arms buildup asserts: "Although US accusations of Soviet bloc military support for Grenada were thus correct, it is hard to see from where else the PRG could have got weapons and equipment to defend itself, given the manner in which its early requests for help had been denied by the Western allies".¹⁰ Thus Grenada's military expansion is attributed to survival concerns directly resulting from United States' coercion and intimidation.

URGENT FURY itself is painted as simply the climax of a long and increasingly hostile series of American provocations against the socialist government of Maurice Bishop. Burrowes quotes an American journalist in his effort to portray a right-wing Reagan administration eager to flex its muscles: "In a sense, the Reagan administration has been looking for a situation like Grenada from the day it took office. Senior foreign policy officials say that this is an administration that has felt a need--indeed, a compulsion --to demonstrate the use of American power, especially in the Western Hemisphere..."¹¹

Several authors also clearly believe that the terrorist bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon three days before launch-

ing the Grenada invasion clearly fortified the Reagan administration's political convictions that something had to be done to demonstrate American strength. Burrowes' quote of a British journalist most succinctly lays out this argument: "To respond to a bomb in Beirut by invading an island in the Caribbean makes excellent sense, in terms of the world-view of the Right, which is the view of many millions of Americans."³

This intense determination to show American resolve not only forced the U.S. into a hasty decision to invade Grenada, but according to Gordon Lewis, led to URGENT FURY being an unlawful operation that violated Article 8 of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) treaty of 1981, the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter, and Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Lewis summarizes his viewpoint in these terms: "It is a sacred principle of international relations which dictates that no foreign forces can ever enter the territory of a state unless properly invited by the duly constituted authority of that state to help defend it against some clearly defined external threat".¹⁴ Lewis also dismisses the request for assistance generated by Grenada's Governor-General Sir Paul Scoon as "unprecedented and directly in conflict with constitutional authority".¹⁵

Lewis, Burrowes, and Payne, et.al. consistently view the U.S. declaration of severe risk to American students at St George's University Medical School as a propaganda smokescreen for removal of an objectionable government. Lewis offers the most detailed refutation of the argument that American citizens were in grave

danger. He cites repeated assurances by the Revolutionary Military Council that foreign nationals would be safeguarded.¹⁶

The final criticism of URGENT FURY portrays an image of massive, disproportionate U.S. force that ineptly maneuvered its ground units, used excessive firepower, and suffered severe intelligence shortcomings that prolonged the fighting and caused unnecessary casualties. The major Ranger engagement to seize the Point Salines airport, the unsuccessful Navy SEAL attempt to rescue Sir Paul Scoon, and the inadvertent bombing of a mental hospital in St George's all highlight U.S. clumsiness in executing what critics declare should have been a simple operation against a severely outmatched enemy force.¹⁷

A synopsis of criticism of American performance in Grenada provides this snapshot: a politicized American bureaucracy conducting a knee-jerk anti-communist foreign policy that led to an unnecessary and unlawful invasion of a tiny helpless Caribbean island.

A Rational, Measured Response in Defense of America's Interests

A totally contrary view of U.S. policy towards Grenada from 1979-1983 suggests that URGENT FURY was a thoughtfully chosen response to a worsening crisis in the Caribbean that directly threatened vital American interests. This view paints the picture of a synchronized bureaucracy that acted consistently to prevent an unpredictable, immature government from falling prey to Cuban-Soviet designs for greater mischief in the Caribbean Basin and

Latin America.

While most literature supporting American intervention in Grenada focuses narrowly on URGENT FURY itself, Daniel Bolger's analysis of U.S. involvement extends back to Sir Eric Gairy's role as the island's first prime minister following 1974 independence from Great Britain. Bolger, in tracing the birth of Maurice Bishop's NJM party and its subsequent overthrow of Gairy in 1979, does not disagree with any of the previously quoted authors' assertions that Bishop's coup was not sponsored by Cuba or the Soviet bloc. Bolger does not challenge critics' claims that the PRG materially improved health, economic, and educational conditions in Grenada. Cpt Bolger does, however, vigorously contradict claims that American behavior drove an innocent socialist government to Fidel Castro's doorstep. He details close Cuban-Grenadian cooperation shortly after the March, 1979 coup that included Cuban representative Julian Torres-Rizo's attendance at PRG and NJM party meetings and frequent night arms shipments.¹⁸ Bolger also provides convincing evidence of military expansion and adventurism beyond the confines of the Spice Island: "By 1985, the PRG hoped to deploy an army of four regular and fourteen reserve infantry battalions numbering more than 10,000 soldiers and armed to the teeth with automatic weapons, artillery, and armored vehicles...Grenadian troops served in Nicaragua, assisting the Sandanistas against the restive Miskito Indians. Bishop volunteered a battalion of Grenadians for duty in Namibia, against South African forces, although these men did not deploy before the American assault".¹⁹

U.S. intelligence also had a clear picture of growing internal repression by the PRG. Bishop had suspended the island's 1974 constitution less than two weeks after seizing power. In June 1980, the first political arrests occurred, following a bomb explosion at a NJM rally.²⁰ However, the violent split of the NJM into rival factions headed by Deputy Prime Minister Bernard Coard and Maurice Bishop, respectively, was not anticipated by either American or Cuban authorities. Neither nation was prepared for Grenada's plunge into anarchy following the October 14, 1983 seizure of power by Coard and army commander Hudson Austin and Bishop's brutal murder five days later.

Daniel Bolger strongly disputes claims that the Point Salines airport project possessed no military features. He specifically describes armored jet fuel storage tanks, hot-refuel piping embedded in the parking aprons, and reinforced concrete bunkers. Nearby, an InterSputnik satellite communications station was in advanced planning.²¹ When these facilities are tied to the May 1980 landing rights treaty between the USSR and PRG, the capability of servicing Soviet Tu-95 Bear long-range surveillance aircraft as well as a wide variety of transport aircraft becomes apparent.²²

By the autumn of 1983, Grenada had become a major concern for American strategists. However, no specific contingency plans were on the shelf when Bishop's violent overthrow occurred that October. Caribbean neighbors watched with growing alarm as the NJM power struggle degenerated into murder and martial law. Bolger enumerates the specifics: "Hudson Austin dissolved the civil government,

placed the governor-general under house arrest, declared martial law and a twenty-four-hour shoot-on-sight curfew...They jailed suspect journalists and political foes, increased army and militia patrols, and broadcast a continuing series of emergency declarations over Radio Free Grenada".²³

As Caribbean and American leaders saw the collapse of civil rule, the safety of foreign nationals, particularly American medical students, came into question. It became apparent to the U.S. Ambassador to Barbados, Milan Bish, on 22 October that the students' safety could no longer be assured. Grenadian officials' behavior was clearly at odds with their public pronouncements.²⁴ U.S. fears of a potential Tehran-style hostage situation prompted the Department of Defense to divert LANTCOM forces including a carrier battle group, Amphibious Squadron 4 and the embarked 22d Marine Amphibious Unit from their movement toward Lebanon southward towards Grenada on October 20th. Concurrently, OECS members met to determine their response to an increasingly dangerous situation. On October 21st the OECS formally requested U.S. assistance. Following an NSC meeting, President Reagan approved the National Security Decision Directive for a military response on October 22nd. It should be noted that all of these American and OECS actions occurred before the Beirut bombing of the Marine Barracks on October 23rd. The need for prompt military action became even more urgent upon receipt of Governor-General Sir Paul Scoon's request for assistance on October 24th.²⁵

One of the chief complaints of URGENT FURY's critics was the

unlawfulness of the OECS-American action. John Norton Moore, in his book, Law and the Grenada Mission, eloquently defends the legality of this military action. He offers solid documentary evidence to buttress his arguments. He concisely summarizes the legal basis for URGENT FURY: "Factually, the Grenada mission took place at the independent request of eight of the most immediately affected nations of the Caribbean region, acting pursuant to the applicable regional security treaty for Grenada; at the request of the Governor-General of Grenada; in a setting of breakdown of government authority and widespread threats to civilians; and with the support of 91 percent of the Grenada population".²⁶

The final criticism leveled at URGENT FURY was its inept and disproportionate use of force against a relatively harmless force of Cuban construction workers and disorganized militia. Part of that criticism essentially declares supporting intelligence to be bankrupt. While it is not this writer's intent to dissect the specific engagements of URGENT FURY, two sources provide detailed accounts of the operational planning, supporting intelligence, and actual execution of the mission. Vice Admiral Joseph Metcalf III, the commander of Joint Task Force 120 for the operation, gives a particularly helpful analysis of how the 39 hours of planning time available from receipt of the execution order to the launch of initial combat operations were used.²⁷ Similarly, Daniel Bolger refutes charges that URGENT FURY was an unmitigated disaster and offers perceptive insights into rules of engagement, availability of adequate intelligence, and employment of combat assets

of the various services.²⁸

A synopsis of URGENT FURY's defenders' views projects the image of a U.S. administration that was aware of specific threats to U.S. and Caribbean nations' interests posed by the PRG; showed restraint until a violent coup threatened U.S. lives, Caribbean security, and Grenadian human rights; planned and executed a lawful military response to a legitimate request for assistance; and promptly withdrew military forces upon restoration of order with the whole-hearted support of the Grenada citizenry.

A Classic Chicken or Egg Dilemma

One might easily conclude from the widely divergent views of URGENT FURY's roots and legitimacy that critics have lost their objectivity in a flood of anti-American bias, and defenders of the operation serve as Reagan administration apologists. Actually, both viewpoints reinforce Graham Allison's contention that government activity is a blend of three models: the rational actor, the organizational process, and bureaucratic politics. Opponents of the Grenada invasion tend to focus on negative effects of the Reagan ideology on America's foreign policy apparatus while proponents highlight interagency cooperation and rational decision making.

The final judgement revolves around the central question of whether or not State Department, CIA, and Department of Defense players acted on the basis of accurate information against a set of clearly understood national interests within a framework of inter-

national law. More specifically, did Maurice Bishop's government act in response to politically blinded American bureaucratic behavior or did the United States pursue a rational policy based on a well-defined threat? This classic question of "whether the chicken or egg came first" requires sifting through the conflicting evidence offered by both sides. It is this writer's conclusion that URGENT FURY's defenders offer the far more credible case. While one cannot deny that senior U.S. officials generally shared a conservative, anti-communist ideology, the overwhelming detailed intelligence on Cuban and Grenadian duplicity is convincing. Bureaucratic and organizational friction between 1979 and 1983 may indeed have slowed American recognition and correction of festering problems in Grenada, but when faced with the dangerous circumstances of Bernard Coard and Hudson Austin's brutal seizure of power in October 1983, the American government and OECS nations responded logically and lawfully.

Lessons for the Future

The value of studying URGENT FURY doesn't lie in a judgement of whose hindsight is best. More important are the handful of questions arising from that operation that can usefully guide future decisions. The following issues may help the U.S. national security bureaucracy intelligently navigate through the treacherous waters of peacekeeping and peacemaking commitments:

- does the American intelligence community possess a suffi-

cient human intelligence capability to observe and report on several troublespots simultaneously?

- are members of the foreign policy bureaucracy capable of judging emerging events in the developing nations without excessive ideological or political bias?

- does a given American administration possess a coherent interagency/department process at several levels that can manage multiple crises scattered throughout the world?

- how many concurrent military operations can the U.S. government effectively conduct?

- do key decision makers adequately understand the international law framework that interlocks the United Nations, regional alliances, and unilateral crisis response?

The lessons of URGENT FURY clearly dictate we must be able to accurately identify and assess multiple threats to U.S. interests, pass information quickly across bureaucratic boundaries, and make decisions with a clear understanding of legal constraints and military capabilities. Unfortunately, the next three decades may offer us far too many opportunities to apply these lessons.

Notes

- ¹ Reynold A. Burrowes, Revolution and Rescue in Grenada(Westport:Greenwood Press, 1988)266.
- ² Anthony Payne, Paul Sulton, and Tony Thorndike, Grenada: Revolution and Invasion(New York:St.Martin's Press, 1984)18.
- ³ Burrowes 41-43.
- ⁴ Ibid 42.
- ⁵ Payne 61.
- ⁶ Ibid 62.
- ⁷ Ibid 63.
- ⁸ Ibid 63-64.
- ⁹ Ibid 65-66.
- ¹⁰ Ibid 84-85.
- ¹¹ Ibid 85.
- ¹² Burrowes 72.
- ¹³ Ibid 73.
- ¹⁴ Gordon K. Lewis, Grenada: The Jewel Despoiled(Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987)108.
- ¹⁵ Ibid 107.
- ¹⁶ Ibid 104
- ¹⁷ Payne 158-1
- ¹⁸ Daniel P. Bolger, Americans At War(Navato:Presidio Press, 1988)266.
- ¹⁹ Ibid 266.
- ²⁰ Burrowes 38.
- ²¹ Bolger 269.
- ²² Ibid 269.

²³Ibid 271.

²⁴Ibid 272.

²⁵Ibid 274.

²⁶John N. Moore, Law and the Grenada Mission(Charlottesville: Center for Law and National Security, 1984)85.

²⁷Joseph Metcalf III, "Decision Making and the Grenada Rescue Operation", Ambiguity and Command, ed. James March and Roger Weisinger-Baylon(New York:Harper Collins,1986)277-296.

²⁸Daniel P. Bolger, "Operation Urgent Fury and Its Critics", Military Review July 1986:58-69.